

Capitol Hill Vignettes: TV Tossup; Privacy

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The House seems to be moving closer to televised floor debates while the Senate pulls back.

Rep. B.F. Sisk (D-Calif.) who chairs a House Rules ad hoc subcommittee charged with looking into broadcasting, seems optimistic that by Jan. 1, 1977, cameras and microphones will be operating in the House chamber.

The Rules Committee held up an earlier TV resolution because of the cost—about \$2 million. Now the four networks—ABC, CBS, PBS and NBC—have agreed to provide the equipment, manpower and installation on a pool basis. They also would run the cameras and make audio and video available to other broadcasters and to the House, itself, which could have live closed-circuit coverage.

The networks also have said by using new low light-level cameras, they could operate with the present House chamber lighting system.

Sisk plans further Rules Committee hearings later this month and hopes to have a resolution on the House floor by November.

On the Senate side, however, the once optimistic majority whip, Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) seems less inclined to push for microphones and cameras on the floor. The often-bitter New Hampshire debate has temporarily, at least, cooled Byrd's ardor. He worries that one group of senators, pushing hard on a narrow issue, could, with television's help, create a distorted view of issues under debate.

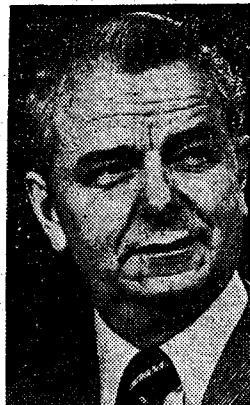
WHO IS GOING to run the first hearings on the FBI's performance during the 1962 Kennedy assassination—Rep. Don Edwards (D-Calif.) or Rep. Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.)?

In late September news stories appeared about a letter from Lee Harvey Oswald to the FBI Dallas field office prior to the assassination.

Edwards, chairman of a House Judiciary subcommittee on FBI oversight, called bureau Director



REP. B.F. SISK



SEN. ROBERT BYRD

...TV question pressed in house; interest wanes in Senate

Clarence M. Kelley and Attorney General Edward H.

Almost four weeks later, Abzug announced on the House floor that her Government Operations subcommittee, with jurisdiction over FBI recordkeeping, was going to hold hearings Oct. 22, on the same Oswald letter. Edwards read her statement in the Congressional Record, got on the phone with Kelley, and was assured he had the prior claim.

Levi and said he wanted to look into the matter. Levi and Kelley said they were investigating and to hold up before scheduling any hearings.

Now Edwards plans his hearing for Oct. 21, and has a promise from Kelley not to appear before Abzug, until after Kelley's commitment to Edwards is fulfilled.

Competition among committees, using the FBI as bait for headline-making hearings, is a fear on Capitol Hill and within the administration growing out of the new enthusiasms for intelligence agency oversight.

CONGRESS GOT AN exemption to violate the Privacy Act it passed last year—but for good purposes.

Congressional casework—the handling of requests by constituents for assistance

with the federal bureaucracy—is a big part of a legislator's job, and it can help—at election time.

On Saturday, Sept. 27, when the Privacy Act went into effect, the biggest federal agencies such as the Defense Department, Health, Education and Welfare, and the Veterans Administration, took the act literally. They would not give third parties—including congressional aides—information from their files on individuals without their expressed written authority as required by the new law. Since most casework is handled by telephone, inquiries on behalf of constituents virtually came to a halt.

By Monday, Sept. 29, however, the Privacy Act's authors were conferring with the White House.

By Friday afternoon, Abzug—speaking to the House chamber—was able to announce that she had received a letter from James T. Lynn, director of the Office of Management and Budget, revising rules so as to establish "an acceptable method of processing constituent inquiries." The administration, Lynn wrote, did not want "to deny individuals the benefit of assistance of members of Congress."